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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 02//06

Index:

- (1) Prime Minister Koizumi's failure to attend rally calling for return of Northern Territories creating stir in Russia; Perhaps he intends to leave issue on back burner?
- (2) GSDF's 10-year participation in UN PKO on Golan Heights; UNDOF commander says, "They are the best ambassador"
- (3) Japan enters into final coordination with other countries over timing for GSDF pullout from Iraq
- (4) World is being divided in two; Japan needs to discuss what image to project as a state
- (5) ITC launches investigation into Toyota on suspicion of violating US patent, aiming perhaps to constrain Japanese automakers; Move could become source of bilateral trade dispute
- (6) Yamaguchi-gumi commands majority of gangsters nationwide

ARTICLES:

- (1) Prime Minister Koizumi's failure to attend rally calling for return of Northern Territories creating stir in Russia; Perhaps he intends to leave issue on back burner?

By Akiyoshi Komaki, Moscow

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's failure to attend a national rally calling for the return of the Russia-held four islands off Hokkaido on Feb. 7 is creating a stir in Russia. Some have raised the view that Koizumi may have excluded the Northern Territories issue from his priority issues since he has been busy devoting foreign policy attention to Asia. Koizumi attended annual rallies in 2002, 2003, and 2004. He did not take part in last year's rally because of his cold, but he sent his proxy to deliver his message. However, he did not send even a proxy to this year's rally.

Russia's Independent Newspaper wrote in its edition on Feb. 8: "It is strange that Prime Minister Koizumi, who takes the time to visit Yasukuni Shrine, did not attend the national rally."

The Kommersant Daily pointed out in yesterday's edition: "For Koizumi, complicated relations with China are far more important (than the northern territorial issue). Understanding that there will be no improvement in the territorial issue, he has no desire to spend any time on the matter."

(2) GSDF's 10-year participation in UN PKO on Golan Heights; UNDOF commander says, "They are the best ambassador"

YOMIURI (Page 6) (Slightly abridged)
February 10, 2006

By Michiro Okamoto

Ten years have passed since the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF)

TOKYO 00000749 002 OF 007

SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 02//06

dispatched its troops for the first time to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights. UNDOF undertakes the task of supervising the implementation and maintenance of the ceasefire between Syria and Israel. A GSDF battalion has engaged in the transport duties as part of logistic support. The troops currently stationed there is the 20th unit to be dispatched. Their activity is inconspicuous, but their continued performance in their duties as part of PKO have set the basis for the present-day international contributions by the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), for instance, assistance to Iraq reconstruction. This reporter visited the GSDF unit on the Golan Heights in the midst of the severe winter.

The day was cloudy and a cutting wind was lashing at my face. A GSDF member wearing a blue helmet was driving a bulldozer to smooth the dirt road. This was to ensure the smooth traffic of ceasefire monitoring vehicles. I saw the intruder prevention fence along the ceasefire line (set in 1974) on the Israeli side a few hundred meters away.

During the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel captured the Golan Heights in the southwest of Syria. Lying on the east side is the disengagement zone, which is the major sphere of GSDF activity. The area was wasteland running 75 kilometers from north to south and extending 200 meters to nine kilometers in width. In the northern Golan is Mt. Hermon (2,814 meters), covered with snow. At times explosions from demining echoed across the area.

Under criticism that sending SDF personnel abroad was the same as deploying troops abroad to do battle, and after much debate on the question of carrying weapons, Japan in spite of the fears, dispatched GSDF personnel to the Golan Heights. Then UNDOF Commander Kusters told me: "I'd like to see SDF personnel come as full-fledged soldiers."

Incumbent UNDOF Commander Sharma gave high praise to the GSDF unit, noting: "It is essential. Japan has sent its best 'ambassador.'" The total distance of transport by the GSDF unit has come to about 2,620,000 meters - equivalent to circling the earth 65 times. The gross weight of transport reaches 23,000

tons.

In recent years the Japanese troops' role has become increasingly important. That is because with a surge in the construction of private houses, some parts of the area have become blind spots for ceasefire monitoring. So patrolling has become more important. Helping the patrol is the gravel path leveled by Japanese troops. The distance of the leveled road exceeds 350 kilometers.

Some 880 SDF personnel experienced the participation in the Golan PKO. Masahisa Sato, who had headed the first GSDF unit to the Golan Heights, later headed the advance unit to Iraq and was stationed in Samawah. All those SDF personnel have now been central to SDF troops to be dispatched abroad.

There are challenges for them to tackle, however. For example, the SDF cannot take part in policing training for camps because of the restrictions relating to the right to collective defense. Masaki Maejima, a member of the logistic staff now working for the headquarters, said soberly: "Ten years of experience could be taken as a big step forward, but it has only been 10 years."

TOKYO 00000749 003 OF 007

SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 02//06

(3) Japan enters into final coordination with other countries over timing for GSDF pullout from Iraq

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
February 10, 2006

Japan has now entered into the final phase of coordination with other countries over when and how to recall its Ground Self-Defense Force troops currently deployed in the southern Iraqi city of Samawah. The government plans to complete the pullout of all those Samawah-based GSDF members during Prime Minister Koizumi's remaining term of office as president of his ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The government would also like to start the GSDF's withdrawal from Iraq during the first half of this year. However, the situation there remains sensitive when it comes to whether four government-set preconditions for the GSDF's pullout—such as progress in Iraq's political process—will be all met within that timeframe.

Japan paying attention to Britain's moves

Britain is leading Japan and other multinational force members with its timetabled pullout of troops currently deployed to Iraq's southeastern districts including Samawah.

On Jan. 11, Brittan's Defense Secretary Reid met with Japan's Defense Agency Director General Nukaga in London. In the meeting, Reid said: "That country's southeastern districts are comparatively safe. There's no need for our and Australian troops to keep staying there any longer." With this, Reid told Nukaga that the time for Britain's troop pullout was drawing near.

Reid also showed the British military's pullout plan. The British defense minister told Nukaga that Britain would move its troops to Basra or elsewhere in Iraq's southeastern province and would flexibly pull them out of Iraq while watching how Iraqi security forces will maintain public security in that country. Nukaga told Reid that the GSDF would be closely in touch with the British and Australian forces.

According to Japanese government officials, Britain has told Japan that it would like to spare troops for Afghanistan and other regions. "They cannot afford to keep troops in a safe place," one Japanese government official said.

On Jan. 23, working-level officials from the governments of Japan, Britain, Australia, and the United States also met in London. In that meeting, a British official revealed a plan to "complete the pullout of troops in May at the earliest." This British pullout plan is premised on Iraq's establishment of

government as scheduled. It will take a couple of months to withdraw troops, so Britain is expected to begin its troop pullout in March.

Senior officials in the Japanese Foreign Ministry and the Cabinet Secretariat have stressed that the British government has yet to

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make a formal decision on that pullout plan. "That meeting was not at a level for the government to make a decision," one official recounted. This official also said the four countries were prying into each other.

TOKYO 00000749 004 OF 007

SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 02//06

In setting a timetable for the GSDF's withdrawal from Iraq, however, Japan cannot ignore the British military's moves in that country. "They're likely to come under attack when withdrawing," a senior official of the Foreign Ministry explained. This official went on: "GSDF personnel are almost unarmed. But in the case of British forces, their troops are fully armed and they have enough troops. So the GSDF has no choice but to move together."

In response to the British military's moves, the government is now already seeking behind the scenes to recall the Samawah-based GSDF contingent while looking into Japan's overseas troop dispatches in the past, such as the GSDF's withdrawal from East Timor. The government is simulating when and how to withdraw the GSDF troops from Iraq.

Iraq yet to establish government, Tokyo urged for difficult decision

The Japanese government has set four preconditions for the GSDF's simulated withdrawal from Iraq. One of these preconditions is how other Iraq-based multinational force members will move. Another key factor is progress in Iraq's political process. "We will continue to help Iraq with its people's nation-rebuilding efforts," Koizumi told reporters on Feb. 2. "That's important," he added.

The second precondition factored in by the government is public security, which is synchronized with progress in the political process. Nukaga, in his meeting with Reid, noted that how a full-fledged government will come into existence is closely linked to public security.

On Jan. 20, Iraq announced the outcome of its recent national election. Iraq's major groups-representing the Shiites, Kurds, and Sunnis-have just kicked off their talks to establish a new government of Iraq's own. One Japanese government official predicts Iraq's establishment of a new government into March even at the earliest.

However, the British military might begin its troop pullout in March. A high-ranking official of the Japanese government says, "We can't withdraw until the new government becomes stabilized." As it stands, the Japanese government will be urged to make a difficult decision.

The fourth and last precondition set by the Japanese government is progress in Iraq's reconstruction. The GSDF wound up its water supply service a year ago. A government official thinks the GSDF has "fulfilled its role to a certain extent."

At the same time, however, what to do about Japan's new contribution to Iraq's reconstruction after the GSDF's withdrawal is also likely to become a key. That is because "the United States wants the GSDF to leave its footprints in Iraq somehow," a senior official of the Foreign Ministry says. On Jan. 17, US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld met with Nukaga. "All countries are reluctant to train local security forces, so it would be appreciated if Japan will do so," Nukaga later quoted Rumsfeld as saying in that meeting. Nukaga answered, "It's legally

impossible."

TOKYO 00000749 005 OF 007

SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 02//06

The United States has also asked Japan behind the scenes to participate in a "provincial reconstruction team" (PRT) that is made up of armed forces and civilians for Iraq's public security and reconstruction. However, Japan is reluctant to consider the PRT initiative. A senior official of the Foreign Ministry has voiced concern, saying: "We must carefully nail down the United States' intention, or our relationship we have established through the Self-Defense Forces' deployment could worsen."

(4) World is being divided in two; Japan needs to discuss what image to project as a state

YOMIURI (Page 11) (Excerpts)
February 9, 2006

By Yukio Okamoto, head of Okamoto Associates

US President Bush last week delivered his State of the Union address. The speech seemed to have parts that received applause from only members of the Republican Party, more so than in usual years. Bipolarization is apparently in progress in the US. President Bush is losing his power base, which has made it more difficult for him to unite the American people.

The US is wounded. In particular, its foreign policy is seriously hurt. The opening of the Iraq War, based on wrong information, the abuse of inmates at Iraqi prisons, and the treatment of detainees at the Guantanamo security facility are shaking the moral fiber of American diplomacy. A chastened American thus has taken no action in the face of the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people in Sudan.

Bipolarization is also going on in all corners of the world. Though the reasons may be different, the climate and conditions exist in many countries for treating anti-American actions in a matter of fact way. Examples include the victory of the Islamic militant group Hamas in the recent Palestinian election, Iran's drive to become a nuclear state, and the suppression of human rights in Burma.

In South Korea, key government positions are now filled with officials from a generation that was persecuted during the military-regime period. One senior US official observed that South Korea is rapidly breaking away from the US because this generation saw the shadow of the US behind the military regime at the time."

The US is no longer able to form an international order on its own. On the other hand, China and India have emerged at tremendous speed. According to the World Bank's statistics, China ranks second in the world in terms of purchasing power parity, and India is in fourth place. The extraordinary amounts of natural resources and energy needed by these two countries, both of which have enormous populations, have brought about a sharp rise in crude oil prices. In particular, China is trying to corner natural resources all over the world, including crude oil in the Middle East and mines in Africa, backed by its foreign currency reserves, which stand at a pronouncedly high level in the world.

Having spent much energy on its integration, Europe's drive to go out into outside the region has declined. The rise of China and

TOKYO 00000749 006 OF 007

SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 02//06

India is beginning to bring an end to the age of the US and Europe in the true sense of the term.

The free-market economy and globalization have created winners,

such as the US, China and India. But there also are many losers in Latin America, Africa, and Europe. The multilateral trade talks (Doha Round) aimed for trade liberalization remain stalled. The divide between successful countries and those that are not is widening due to the emergence of free competition and information and technology (IT), a powerful tool.

Religion is also accelerating the bipolarization. The religious right in the US and the Russian Orthodox Church are becoming more conservative. The expansion of Islamic extremists is not only intensifying tension in the Middle East but also having a major impact on the world. Such factors have served as a cause of racial disturbances in Europe.

What image of the state and basic policy should Japan pursue amid such a trend? We need to discuss what image of the state we would like to pursue over the mid- to long-term. To that end, there are lots of matters to attend to, including becoming a mid-size and high-performance country or starting up human exchanges with China with an eye on 10 years hence. This is no time to engage in petty disputes.

Yukio Okamoto: Former prime ministerial assistant. 60 years old.

(5) ITC launches investigation into Toyota on suspicion of violating US patent, aiming perhaps to constrain Japanese automakers; Move could become source of bilateral trade dispute

YOMIURI (Page 8) (Full)
February 10, 2006

The International Trade Commission (ITC) on Feb. 8 started investigation into Toyota Motors regarding the technology it has applied to its hybrid cars, which employ both an electric motor and an engine. The investigation is based on Article 337 of the US Tariff Act, which regulates unfair trade practices. The move is likely to become a new source of trade friction between Japan and the US. The investigation was launched in response to a complaint filed by Solomon Technologies, a machinery manufacturer. It is viewed as being aimed to check Japanese automakers, such as Toyota, which are expanding their business performance in the US through brisk sales of hybrid cars.

Sales of fuel-saving hybrid cars are sharply increasing in the US auto market in the wake of a rise in gasoline prices, leading to an increase in the shares of Japanese automobiles.

There is a preliminary calculation that the sales of hybrid cars will increase to 780,000 units, four times the current level, by 2012. General Motors, the largest automaker in the US, and Ford Motors, plan to manufacture hybrid cars on a full scale, centered on sports utility vehicles, but they are far behind Toyota.

While the two major US automakers are suffering a long-standing sales slump, Toyota has tried to increase local production in order to avoid the recurrence of Japan-US auto friction. As part of such efforts, it has decided to manufacture the hybrid version of Camry sedans in the US.

TOKYO 00000749 007 OF 007

SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 02//06

However, since it is difficult to locally manufacture the complicated hybrid system, it has to rely on imports for the procurement of key parts. For this reason, if the ITC has ruled that Toyota is guilty of infringing on a US patent, it will have to take a second look at its strategy for the sales of hybrid cars on the North American market. In addition, since Toyota has transferred the hybrid technology to Nissan Motors and Ford Motors, the outcome of the ITC 's investigation will likely affect the hybrid car strategies of other companies.

(6) Yamaguchi-gumi commands majority of gangsters nationwide

MAINICHI (Page 28) (Full)
February 10, 2006

It was learned yesterday from the National Police Agency's 2005 report on gangs that the membership of Yamaguchi-gumi is about 27,000 (an increase of 700 from the previous year) or about 50.1% of the entire membership of organized groups of gangsters. Since the boss of the Yamaguchi-gumi was replaced last August, the largest organized group of gangsters in Japan has increased its membership, such as absorbing other gangs. The NPA is alarmed that Yamaguchi-gumi has expanded its membership.

The entire membership of all gangs totaled about 43,000 at the end of 2005 (drop of 1,000 from year before). When adding the quasi-membership of gangsters to the full membership, the number of gangsters was about 86,300 (drop of 700 from the previous year). The number of gangsters was on the increase from 1996 until last year, when it declined for the first time in ten years.

The number of Yamaguchi-gumi members including quasi-members of about 19,300 (increase of 900 from a year earlier), however, increased last year to about 41,000 or 47.5% of the whole. The membership of Yamaguchi-gumi has continued to expand from 36.2% of the whole in 2001.

The number of full- and quasi-members of the three major organized groups of mobsters -- Yamaguchi-gumi, Sumiyoshi-kai, and Inagawa-kai -- totaled about 63,000 (increase of 1,700 from the previous year) last year. The membership of 63,000 is equivalent to 73% of the whole membership of gangsters.

According to the NPA, the activities of organized mobsters have become diversified, with activities including taking protection money from shopkeepers, billing fraud, and wiretapping.

In addition, the full- and quasi-memberships are almost always the same numbers. The NPA sees the gangs thus as disguising their activities.

SCHIEFFER